2020-02-28

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Mart, M::0000-0001-5055-9951

10.1080/03004279.2020.1734041
Education 3-13
Informa UK Limited

Professional Development Opportunities for Early Years Teachers Using Social Media: The Case of England and Turkey[1]

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[1] This research has been extracted from an unpublished PhD research.

Professional Development Opportunities for Early Years Teachers Using Social Media: The Case of England and Turkey

Professional development is a key skill for all teachers and needs to be promoted. However, there are quite different practices within countries because of different qualification requirements (Oberhuemer, Schreyer & Neuman, 2010). To decrease the practical gap between the countries, early years teachers in one developing and one developed country have been chosen to use social media as a way of interacting with each other and furthering their professional development. Kolb's Experiential Learning Model has been adapted as a theoretical underpinning for the research. To identify the impact of the model, interviews and observations have been used to collect data. Findings show that there have been positive outcomes that support professional development for the participating teachers.

Keywords: professional development, early years, outdoor activities, interaction, social media, cross cultural

Introduction

Professional early childhood education and care (ECEC) staff are associated with providing high quality early childhood education and care services. Although there has been considerable attention given to exploring the initial training of those who work in ECEC services, less is known about models of professional development and how they facilitate opportunities for critical reflection on, and development of, practice. In particular, in a time of scarce resource, both financial and time, there is a need to explore viable ways in which those who work in ECEC can engage in professional development opportunities, while minimising cost and time implications. In the digital age, online platforms appear to offer one viable option for providing professional development, whilst having the additional advantage of not being bound by geography. We therefore explore the potential of utilising a social media platform for facilitating cross cultural professional development opportunities for ECEC professionals.

Having established the importance of professional development for those working in ECEC, we briefly present the context of our respective case study countries (England and Turkey), before considering the benefits of cross cultural comparisons. We then present Experiential Learning Theory as the underpinning framework that shaped the interactive professional development opportunity presented to participating professionals. We explore the ethical challenges of utilising a social media platform for facilitating professional development, particularly with regard to presenting children's experiences, before exploring the identified benefits of the interactive process. The benefits were established through a qualitative study undertaken with ECEC professionals to ascertain their perspectives on the process and self-identified advantages.

Professional Development

There is international interest in ECEC professionals due to their role in providing quality ECEC services, whereby quality ECEC is associated with supporting children's holistic development and laying the foundations to their lifelong learning. Understandings of quality ECEC are widely identified as problematic due to concerns with quality being reduced to observable indicators of child development that correlate with an economic return for society, rather than adopting a more holistic perspective of the child (Campbell-Barr & Leeson, 2016; Dahlberg, Pence & Moss, 2013; Penn, 2011). However, irrespective of methodological or theoretical approach to the question of quality ECEC, professionals remain a vital asset for the provision of ECEC services. The interest in quality ECEC and associated professionalism has resulted in some countries developing clear professional standards and qualification requirements to work in ECEC services (Oberhuemer, Schreyer & Neuman, 2010). Often premised on technocratic models of professionalism, the focus is on creating the right professionals

to produce the right child outcomes (Urban, 2014). Technocratic models of professionalism favour knowledge that can be observed and assessed, arguably losing sight of the more nuanced ways in which a professional knows how to undertake their professional role (Campbell-Barr, 2017).

Our approach to professionalism is one that recognises knowledges in the plural where the relationship between the epistemic and the social favours the knowledge that meets the demands of professional practice (rather than the demands of technocratic professionalism). The research presented therefore focusses on knowledge that comes from within the profession, offering a ground-up perspective (Dalli, 2008; Osgood, 2010), while also acknowledging that knowledge comes in different forms. In particular, the use of social media potentially risks a reliance on knowledge that can be typed onto a chat forum. However, we consider the use of images as an alternative way to articulate professional practice. Sharing knowledge is important in the development of shared understandings, but we acknowledge the limitations of words in this process, especially when working cross culturally.

The relationship between the epistemic and the social also draws attention to the way in which some, but not all, professional knowledge is developed through initial training. Whilst many initial training models bring together theory and practice in recognition of the importance of both experiential and theoretical knowledge, we contend that experiential knowledge continues to grow once in employment. Although we are cautious of adopting an anti-intellectual stance that suggest all professional knowledge is developed through experience, we are interested in exploring ways in which professional practice can be facilitated through online collaborations that support reflection on practice. The research presented therefore explores the use of social media as a platform for sharing and reflecting on professional practice.

The term professional is problematic within ECEC when considered internationally due to the variable training and qualification requirements that are present (Oberhuemer, Schreyer & Neuman, 2010). ECEC professionalism is characterised by inequalities, whereby those working in ECEC services (that cater for children under statutory school age) may be required to hold different qualifications depending on where they work, often with associated differences in pay and conditions. The inequalities also extend to considering the relationship between those who work in ECEC and those who work in later stages of education, whereby the former often struggle for status. Countries such as New Zealand have sought to address the inequalities (Dalli, 2008), but there are few such examples. The inequalities are important and we do not want to negate the need for ongoing debate, but in this paper we focus on those who are early years teachers working in the state sector. In England this relates to Reception Class Teachers, whilst in Turkey it is kindergarten teachers.

England and Turkey

The ECEC professional context in England is complex, characterised by fluctuating policy initiatives, emblematic of the inequalities raised above. Managers of private voluntary and independent (PVI) settings must hold a Level Three qualification, only half of all other staff must hold a Level Two. Although there have been graduate qualifications introduced that prove popular amongst those working in the PVI sectors, a commitment for all settings to have access to a graduate were removed following austerity measures (Georgeson & Payler, 2014). Those who work in the maintained (state) sector are required to hold a degree with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The differentiation in the qualification requirements creates a clear inequality in the provision of ECEC services that is the issue of ongoing debate. However, to support the comparative element of the project presented there was a focus on those who have

degrees and work in the state sector. Whilst those working in the state sector hold a degree with QTS, not all degrees will include an ECEC focus. Professional development opportunities are voluntary for all staff members and increasingly limited due to restricted funding.

ECEC services in England encompass those that cater for children from birth to the statutory school age of five. All settings are required to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education, 2014), with families being entitled to a free ECEC place the term after their child turns three. (Although there are places available for disadvantaged two year olds – see Georgeson et al. (2014)). Whilst the PVI sector dominates the provision of services for three year olds, most children enter school aged four to access their last year of the Foundation Stage within a Reception Class in a primary school. The Reception Class is a site for political attention, with concerns about ensuring children are school ready and proposals to introduce testing as a way to assess this (Gov.UK, 2019). The increasing demands on Reception Class Teachers has created an environment that leaves many teachers adopting more formalised approaches to practice despite the play-based philosophy that underpins the Foundation Stage (Roberts-Holmes, 2012).

In the case of Turkey, preschool education is a preparation for school; supporting physical, cognitive and emotional development; reflecting the equality drivers of early intervention, alongside supporting the use of Turkish language for children aged three to six years (Ministry of National Education, 2013). The preschool is therefore to allow children to have a smooth transition to primary school education, to support children's development (Sevinc, 2006) and provide a way to close the socio-economic gap (Sevinc, 2006).

The Turkish ECEC system focuses on care and education, but the preschool programme is mostly concerned with education and developmentalism (Gören Niron, 2013). The programme for Preschool Education is similar to a curriculum, but acts more as a guidance to teachers, thus maintaining professional autonomy. Research into teachers' approaches to Preschool Education indicates that they face difficulties in applying the programme due to limited materials in the indoor and outdoor areas, lack of guidance on the implementation of the programme (Pişgin Çivik, Ünüvar & Soylu, 2015) and lack of inspection. In Turkey, there are no requirements to follow professional learning opportunities, but there are some optional in-sessional courses for teachers. However, the optional nature of professional development and lack of inspection means that participation in professional development is limited.

As a developing country, Turkey is influenced by the practice of EU countries, regulations from international organizations, the current curriculum and the situation of Turkey (Gören Niron, 2013). However, it should be noted that the situation in Turkey has changed considerably since 2012, particularly politically. In addition, changes in the primary school systems impact on the development of preschool education (Ural & Ramazan, 2007). Since 2012 the school starting age and the primary school system have changed, including a change in the age for when children attend preschool and a revised programme for preschool education in 2013 (Ministry of National Education, 2013).

Comparative ECEC

England and Turkey represent two different ECEC contexts with commonalities and differences in the provision of services and professional development opportunities. For example, whilst notions of ECEC as a preparation for school and a social welfare tool may unite England and Turkey to some extent, they have divergent ECEC histories and socio-economic contexts. The commonalities are illustrative of a limited conception of

ECEC services as meeting the demands of primary education base upon a model of Human Capital (Campbell-Barr & Nygård, 2014; Penn, 2012). The merits of international comparisons are that they facilitate an opportunity to move beyond the Human Capital panopticon of investment and high returns. Developing collaborative professional development opportunities is therefore not about identifying best practice to meet global social welfare demands, but prompting self-reflection.

ECEC has a long history of sharing ideas and practices about pedagogical approaches, evident in the global transference of the ideas of many of the early years pioneers such as Froebel and Montessori. The international sharing of both structural and process features of ECEC is well illustrated by the large scale comparisons undertaken on behalf the European Commission and the OECD (European Commission et al., 2014; OECD, 2015). However, there are many smaller comparative projects, of which this is one, that seek to develop a more nuanced understanding of the provision of ECEC services. Small-scale comparisons are not focussed on the creation of rules with which to govern ECEC services, but are appreciative of the differences and learning opportunities that comparisons promote (Moss et al., 2016). Thus transposing ideas between cultural contexts is seen to negate the historical construction of ECEC services and those who work in them (Oberheumer 2014). Comparative research offers the opportunity to challenge local assumptions about ECEC practice, whilst opening up alternative perspectives and ways of doing things (Tobin et al. 2009) rather than promoting a culture of mimicking. We are aware that a comparison of two risks polarisation, but the focus on England and Turkey was both a convenience sample and a manageable one that offered learning opportunities for the teachers that participated.

The Online Interactions

The intention behind the online sharing of practice was to offer ECEC teachers the opportunity to engage in comparative discussions about their outdoor learning practice. The focus on the outdoors was because of the different practices between the two countries. While the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in England underlines a requirement that teachers are to facilitate children having access to outdoor areas or, to consider outdoor activities in their daily planning (DfE, 2017), the recent Preschool Education Programme in Turkey identifies outdoor activities as optional (Ministry of National Education, 2013). The comparison therefore enables the opportunity to explore how the different conditions influence the provision of outdoor play, whilst considering the role of online interactions as a professional development tool.

Facebook was chosen as the online platform for the research due to its popularity, opportunities for active reflection, and its accessibility to the population (Wilson, Gosling & Graham, 2012), demonstrating that online tools are an important part of modern life and provide access to different kinds of information (Gray, 2014). The use of Facebook not only provided a common platform, but one that facilitated sharing photos and videos. A secret Facebook group for all participants (four English and four Turkish teachers) was established for sharing outdoor activities and ideas. Making the group secret meant that participants had a confidential platform on which to share practice. The sharing of practice focussed on the pedagogic environment, but it was essential that the teachers were aware of the ethical implications of sharing their practice. It was therefore important to state that the responsibility for copyright of content and consent for sharing lay with the teachers.

Photo 1 offers an illustrative example of the interactions on the Facebook group between two teachers from England. In this example, one of the participating English teachers shared her activities with photos and an explanation. Then another teacher

became interested in one of the materials, so asked about its usefulness and where to get it.

Experiential Learning Theory

The professional development process adapted the model of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) in order to explore the benefits of the teachers engaging with each other online. "ELT provides a holistic model of learning process and a multilinear model of adult development, both of which are consistent with what we know about how people learn, grow, and develop" (Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2000, p.228). The traditional ELT follows a cyclical process whereby participants engage in reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, active experimentation and concrete experience. The online interactive professional development opportunity required that an additional step was added (see Figure One). Professional development opportunities can offer new ideas, but the limits of existing models are that they are individualised and/or are often isolated workshops with limited space to think (MacNaughton, 2005). The group dynamic therefore offers opportunities for challenge, resisting a reproduction of ideas.

The ELT model provided a framework with which to structure both the online interactions and the associated research into the process as follows:

- Concrete Experience – teachers were asked to explain their perceptions of outdoor activities in interviews (via first interviews)
- Reflective Observation – teachers were asked to carry out their usual outdoor activities (via first observations)
- Online Interaction – teachers were asked to share what they do, and what they think is important to share with others
- Abstract Conceptualisation – teachers were asked to reflect on changes in their perspectives (in the second interviews)

- Active Experimentation – teachers were observed for changes in their practices (via second observations)

Figure 1 is based on ELT and explains the second part of the research and the incremental transition of the participants' ELT cycle from Reflective Observation to Abstract Conceptualization. Figure 1 indicates the relationship between ELT and interactive tools to support Professional Learning (PL) for the participating teachers. The Online Interactive Professional Learning Model provides two alternative options for the transition from Reflective Observation to Abstract Conceptualization: One is the classic ELT process, and the second one is the online interaction. Therefore, the new model explores the impact of the online interaction in terms of providing in-depth learning opportunities via multimedia presentations: words and pictures, as this can provide various learning opportunities, which are enhanced by the cross-cultural context (see Tobin, Hsueh & Karasawa, 2009). The research therefore focusses on the new model, considering the teachers' engagement with the online sharing of practice and their Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation.

Methodology

The research was designed around the ELT cycle, whereby interviews and observations were undertaken in two stages; one before the online interaction between the teachers in England and Turkey, and one after. During the online interaction, the participating teachers were asked to share their current outdoor practice, using photos, videos and text, thus offering a perspective on outdoor activities. During this, the participants had a chance to reflect on how they perceived and applied outdoor activities. The first set of observations and interviews facilitated this process by asking teachers to give an overview on outdoor learning and the types of activities that they undertook. Interviews were conducted before observations, and there was a systematic observation schedule

that sought to capture the practice of teachers. Figure 2 explains the research process how two countries are included in, and comparative aspects addressed though the research process. As it can be seen from figure 2 one academic year was planned in advance consider the holidays in each country, in order to give teachers the most time to interact cross-culturally to meet the research aims.

Interviews are an appropriate way to explore participants' perceptions of the world and to consider the conditions from their own perspectives (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011), whilst the observations provided "open-ended, first-hand information" (Creswell, 2012, p.213) on the daily practice of the teachers. A conscious effort was made to observe the teachers on different days of the week. The second interviews and observations sought to reflect on the online interaction and forms the basis of the discussion presented.

Sampling

Convenience and voluntary sampling methods were used to select teachers (Mason, 2002), whereby participants who were easily contacted (until a sample of four teachers per country was reached) were involved in the study (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). The voluntary sampling was based on participants' willingness to participate, being reached by friends, friends of friends, and those who expressed an interest in participating in the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Four teachers from each country (England and Turkey) were chosen to participate in the research, from Southern Turkey and the South-West of England. All participants were actively using internet and social media enabling them to participate in the online interaction.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was undertaken. "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents a level of patterned response or

meaning within the data" (Gray, 2014, p.609). NVivo 10 was used to analyse the qualitative data. The themes included freedom, pedagogic roles, professional learning and drawbacks. During the first stage, the themes were mostly general, but were enhanced with data from the second stage. For the purpose of this paper, we first present an overview of pedagogic practice in the two countries as identified in the first interviews and observations, before focusing on the second interviews. In particular, we focus on the theme of professional learning considering the teachers engagement with Facebook, their self-perceived professional development and adjustments to practice.

Ethics

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research, particularly due to the possibility of having photos of children. Therefore, the ethical considerations not only considered preventing harm to the direct participants (the teachers) and respecting and considering their demands and concerns (Flick, 2009), it also considered protection of the children who were in the teachers' classes. The ethical principles of the project drew upon the European Early Childhood Research Association's ethical code (EECERA, 2014), and Plymouth University's Ethics Policy (Plymouth University, 2013). A head teacher information and consent form, teacher information and consent form, and parent information and consent form were compiled. Consent was an ongoing process, whereby the researcher respected the needs and demands of the teacher, but also the children in the classes. As such, children were told about the nature of the research and were allowed to ask questions freely. The researcher also spent time in the classrooms prior to the research so that children could get to know him, but the focus of the research remained on the teachers. All data is confidential, with names changed and identifying features withdrawn from the reporting of the data.

Outdoor Activities in England and Turkey

It is important to underline that “culture acts as a source of continuity and as a brake on the impacts of globalization, rationalization, and economic change” (Tobin, Hsueh & Karasawa, 2009, p.224). Therefore, despite the similarities in the policy objectives for ECEC in the respective countries identified earlier, there were differences as to how outdoor education was perceived. In England, the reception classes had a specific early years outdoor environment that acted as a continuation of the indoor environment, with similar activities in the two spaces. However, in Turkey the outdoor environment was (and is) optional and characterised by a lack of space and materials, although there is evidence of some traditional games being played. The differences illustrate the influence of the curriculum, understandings of the outdoors and the availability of space and resources as having influential roles in regulating the perceptions of the tools to be used in engagements with nature (Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2013). Not only were there structural differences in the outdoor spaces in the two countries, but Mart and Bilton (2014) had previously identified that the perceptions of teachers are shaped regarding their culture. Therefore, there were differences in the terms of use of the outdoors, the tools for activities, the time spent engaged in outdoors activities and the aims of the activities.

The significant differences in outdoor activities identified in phase one of the research related to the structure of the outdoor area. The Turkish preschools used the general school garden for outdoor activities, having a lack of separate (preschool specific) outdoor areas (Mart, Alisinanoğlu & Kesicioğlu, 2015), while the schools in England had a separated outdoor area. Therefore, the teachers in England could organize materials and activities outside, knowing that the materials would not be moved by pupils or teachers working in other stages of the school. Conversely, the use of the general outdoor area by the Turkish teachers even included spaces being used for

vehicle access. The different conditions impacted on the engagement with the outdoor spaces, whereby in England the outdoors was seen as a continuation of the indoor classroom, but in Turkey activities were led by adults and often related to traditional Turkish games.

Having established the existing practices and perceptions of outdoor education in the two countries, the teachers were encouraged to engage in the Secret Facebook group. The online sharing of practice was intended to provide new or different perspectives for participating teachers in devising outdoor activities (McLeod, 2015) as well as information on implementation (Macfarlane et al., 2015).

The Impact of the PD Opportunity

Both English and Turkish teachers identified benefits from participating in the project. For both the English and Turkish teachers there was clear evidence of them adapting their practice following the online interactions, as well as critically reflecting on their practice, albeit in different ways.

For the English teachers, the opportunity to reflect on their practice originated within the first stage of the online interactions, where the teachers selected examples of outdoor activities to post online. For example, Emma claimed that

> "It has made me think a lot more about what we do outside and how we use our resources to support them [the children]. And I think when you are focusing on it, and taking photographs, and posting photographs of them, you're thinking more carefully about what the purpose is, how it has been used whether it is effective rather than thinking I'll just put that outside."

This statement illustrates that the teachers had to think about what and how they were presenting in their outdoor environments. The process therefore engaged the teachers in a process of considering what they would like to articulate about their outdoor environment and how to articulate it. Emma went on to underline the impact of the online interaction in terms of evaluating her own professional practice. This was a

secondary outcome of the process; self-evaluation was not overtly recorded online, but the discussions with the teachers illustrated how the process provided different perspectives and learning opportunities through considering both their own and other participants' posts.

There was some evidence that the English teachers had adapted their practice as a result of the online interactions. Emma offers another example:

> "We've done more as whole class than we would do before. And because of how we worked here, we do a lot of small groups or one to one whereas it's made us … to do more as whole class and work all together rather than being with a few children at a time."

Emma's whole class approach to outdoor activities was a response to examples from Turkey where teachers led adult directed traditional games.

Correspondingly, another English teacher, Alex, claimed that

> "I think it [online interaction] is useful because it gives me ideas on things I could do here, I haven't done before. So maybe using resources that children have to collect rather than things already given to them. Which I noticed lots of the schools in Turkey, they are doing [so]. Children gather their own resources, and they do things."

Photo 2 shows the school playground of an English school, which they would not normally use for outdoor activities. After interacting with the participating Turkish teachers, Emma shared this photo on Facebook showing that they organised activities in this area for that day after considering the examples from Turkey. Another participating English teacher, Sam, further explained during an informal conversation that she was doing some adult-led activities and she tried to do traditional activities more after seeing examples from Turkey. In the formal interviews, Sam expressed:

> "I don't think we have, I don't think it is directing to a massive input [or] impact. I think it is just more kind of a smaller impact. In the fact that you might tweak an activity as just something you've seen. You might borrow an idea, so I don't think you can measure an impact straightaway. I think it is just more to do with that provision, we provide that. Obviously, there is an impact over the time, so it is very hard to measure

> that, I can say, I can see a definite impact. I think actually the impact is the provision, it helps, supports the provision being varied really."

She mentioned the inspiring side of the actual process. Image 3 shows the typical outdoor area of the English teachers. Considering Sam's statement, it is quite difficult to make sudden changes in outdoor activities. In overall statements of the participating English teachers it was evident that the English teachers therefore made small changes to their practice through adapting what they had observed from the Turkish teachers. The changes were both in relation to the learning resources and the way in which pedagogic activities were structured. However, the structural changes were accompanied by reflection on different ways of engaging with the outdoor learning environment. For the Turkish teachers, there were more explicit changes to their practice that also indicated a transformation in their ideas and perceptions around outdoor play. The most notable change for the Turkish teachers was that they were utilising the outdoor spaces, which had not been particularly evident prior to the online interactions. One of the participating Turkish teachers, Derya stated that

> "To be honest, I can't give you any percentage but we weren't going outside. I was saying; the ground was not good, other students [from the school] came over to our area, cars passed through etc. I don't know if these were excuses, but these were the issues. At the time you weren't here, we still went out. It is not an obligation anymore, it is my and children's willingness to go out … it [online interaction] was really effective, and it was really good for us to go out."

Derya's statement highlights the impact of the process with respect to the difficult outdoor environment at her school. Having previously identified the outdoor conditions as unsuitable, the Turkish teachers were exploring ways in which to utilise the outdoor space.

Not only did the Turkish teachers increase the time spent outdoors, but they also took inspiration from the examples that the English teachers offered. The Turkish teachers demonstrated that their inspiration was not merely copying the English activities, as

they clearly thought about the need to adapt the activities sensitively to meet the demands of their cultural context. In some instances the adaptations were explicit, such as not ‘copying’ games involving pigs as pigs are forbidden in Islam. However, other examples illustrated the knowledge that the Turkish teachers had gained in learning about the English activities, particularly through being innovative in adapting the resources to meet local demands and pressures (often financial ones).

In Image 4, the children can be seen undertaking a craft activity. This activity is an adaptation of a general outdoor activity in England in which the outdoor areas had some craft materials for children to engage with. Following online exchange with the English teachers, this Turkish teacher began to provide craft opportunities outside. Neva provided the children with paints and some ideas for how they might use them. The children looked around for outdoor materials to be used with the paints. Some found nice shaped stones to colour and started painting. Children were mostly free to choose what they wanted to paint.

Whilst the adapting of activities illustrates structural changes to the outdoor environments in Turkey, it was also evident that the Turkish teachers were adapting their pedagogical practice. Outdoor activities had tended to be adult led, but the teachers involved the children increasingly in the planning of whole class activities and gave them more autonomy in activity development.

It is important to underline that the participating teachers were not imitating each other, but encouraging each other in developing their professional practice. Some examples illustrated a resourceful use of outdoor spaces. For example, the activity in Photo 5 was shared by the participating Turkish teacher Derya, following her seeing a water tray on Facebook. In this photo, children have a piece of nylon that was unfolded on the ground to make a small pond for the children to sail paper ships and leaves. Derya clarified that

she gave children materials, let them set it up and finally she played with them. This example indicates that the experience of sharing practice online was developing sustained learning for the teachers (Burn, Mutton & Hagger, 2010), and was not just a series of changes to practice.

Neva, another participating Turkish teacher, expressed in a similar way that

> "Indeed, my self-confidence to work in the outdoors has increased, and I think more about it. You know, I was thinking how the outdoors can vary at the beginning. But I have some ideas now … this research led me to think about it more, and made my ideas and practice improve … in brief, I've learnt to make child development an important priority. For example, the poor weather is not a drawback anymore. We would normally excuse ourselves from going outside by saying that the weather is bad, parents may not be happy with the situation etc. In fact, we are responsible for this as teachers. I didn't know about the way to change, and I didn't have information on the outdoors. Thus, this research has helped me understand that we can go outdoors more, and helped me to find ways to overcome such issues."

The quotation illustrates the ways in which the Turkish teachers critically reflected on their past and changing approaches to daily activities. As an example of this, image 6 shows a group of children in Turkey, playing with mud. The impressive aspect of the photo is the joy of children when they play with mud because they had lacked this opportunity until the participating teachers saw various outdoor activities from the English context. Correspondingly, another teacher, Deniz stated that

> "I have learnt, and am learning to be brave to go out, and to bring materials [from inside] because we are hesitating to go out and put materials out from inside ... I've learnt to prepare the outdoor area in advance, so they can choose and play ... In the example of England, the outdoor area is prepared in advance, and materials are out. We weren't doing like that. But I am thinking to make this applicable here ... as I said, we need some time to overcome the issues [coming from current practice]."

In this example, the participating teachers started evaluating his/her practices and comparing with the English examples. However, whilst for the English teachers the critical reflection came in selecting what to post online, for the Turkish teachers the

critical reflection came after the online engagement, both in relation to evaluating what they observed online and in adapting their own daily practice.

Discussion

The findings illustrate that engaging in an online exchange of ideas supported teachers to re-consider their practice (Timperley et al., 2007). The interview quotations show the ongoing process, whereby the collaboration with others (see Colmer, 2017) enabled a process of self-reflection. Participation in cross cultural conversations enabled the teachers to change their ideas and feelings about going outdoors (Biesta, 2010). Some of the online conversations requested tips and advice, such as Alison asked Emma about 'large numicons' used in outdoor activities, and shared photos of them "where she got it from" and "if it was pricy." However, the conversations were not solely about resources as the earlier examples have shown.

Furthermore, the discussions were not solely written. The use of images via social media enabled the conversations to move beyond a reliance on knowledge in a written form. The participants shared images from their activities with a brief explanation about the aim of activities, materials used and how children engaged in activities. These images provided a conceptualised understanding of the activities, and added to the teachers' understanding. This was useful as it provided a visual representation of the differences and use of different resources.

The images also resulted in the teachers thinking about what they were going to present. The examples were practically orientated, focussed on activities, prompting the teachers to carefully prepare the visual representation of their outdoor environments. PD (Professional Development) therefore occurred in the preparing and viewing of the images.

The practical orientation of the examples demonstrates that participants favoured knowledge that is derived from practice and that was regarded as being potentially transferable to another context. A focus on the experiential and practical is perhaps unsurprising as both are closer to the knower than the abstract knowledge of theory (Bernstein, 1999). The physical and lived knowledge of practice is not only close to the knower who has experienced it, but it is seen to be closer to meeting the demands of professional practice as it is less abstract than theory. Theoretical knowledge is distant from the knower, often constructed at another point in history, by someone unknown to the practitioner. Although the distance from theoretical knowledge may exist, it also illustrates a failure of the online discussions to create connections between theory and practice.

While some teachers illustrated a change in their outlook on outdoor learning, particularly in Turkey, what is not clear is whether the knowledge ever shifted beyond their practice. In particular, given the cross cultural elements of the online exchanges it was not clear if the teachers gained anything in relation to a cross cultural perspective. While it was possible that theoretical and cultural exchanges might have developed over a longer period of time, there is an indication that to further the PD some form of facilitator could be beneficial.

Conclusion

PD provides opportunities for teachers to consider their pedagogical practice, but with scarce resources (time and finances) alternative, viable options need to be considered. Online PD offers one possible solution. Using social media, in a way that upholds the ethical responsibilities that teachers have for the children that they work with, offers an easily accessible PD platform. The research demonstrated that engagement with the online exchanges prompted teachers to consider the representations of their pedagogical

practice, but also how they could incorporate the ideas of others in ways that were appropriate to their context.

The research demonstrated the potential for social media to facilitate teachers' PD through their considerations of what and how to present their outdoor environments and in reflecting on the presentation of others' environments. However, reflection was limited to the experiential, potentially offering a de-intellectualised form of reflection that focused on the 'doing' of pedagogical practice rather than considering the why of pedagogical practice. While Emma offered some indication that in considering the presentation of the environment it encouraged her to think about the purpose of the activities and resources being provided outside, such examples were limited. Thus, while online platforms offer the potential to share and reflect on practice, ELT is limited by its focus on experience alone. Social media has potential to provide a platform for online PD, but the research indicates that reflection is limited and either requires more time to generate more theoretical and analytical discussions or would benefit from a facilitator. Besides this, as the research is longitudinal, the number of participants were limited, other research opportunities with a bigger number of participants could validate the effectiveness of this method.

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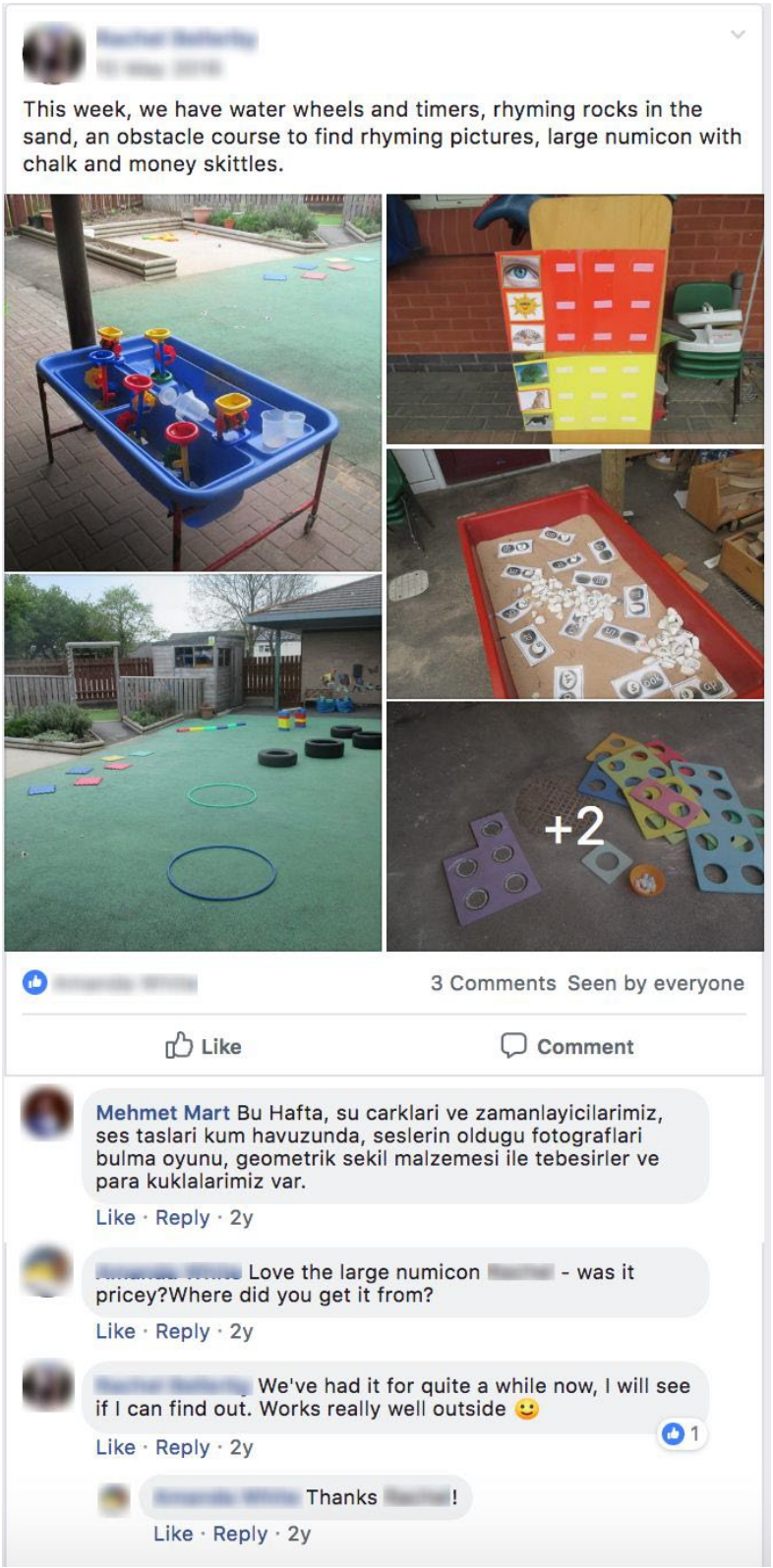

Photo 1: An example from Facebook group interaction

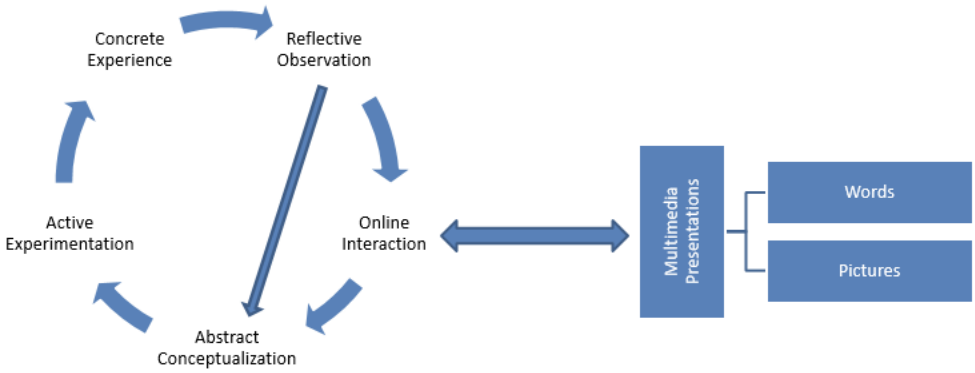

Figure 1: The Online Interactive Professional Learning Model

Months	Action
September 2015	Observation (England) to engage with settings
28 September- 2 October 2015	Primary interview (England)
5 October-30 October 2015	Observation (England)
30 October-13 November 2015	Analyse
16 November-20 November 2015	Observation (Turkey) to engage with settings
23 November-27 November 2015	Primary Interview (Turkey)
30 November-25 December 2015	Observation (Turkey)
25 December-10 January 2016	Analyse
11 January-15 January 2016 (13 January)	Discussion Group (Turkey)
18 January-22 January 2016 (21 January)	Discussion Group (England)
22 January 2016	Webpage/facebook group starts
28 March-1 April 2016	Interview (Turkey)
4 April-29 April 2016	Observation (Turkey)
2 May-6 May 2016	Interview (England)
9 May-4 June 2016	Observation (England)

Figure 2: Data Collection Process

Photo 2: English School-2

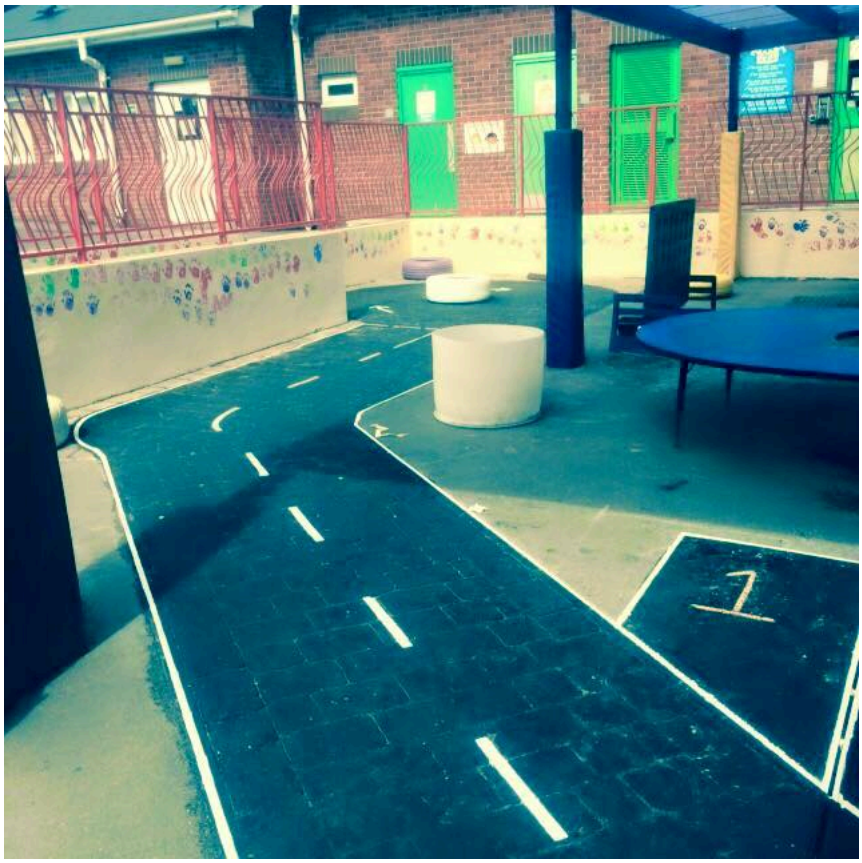

Photo 3: English School-3

Photo 4: Turkish School-3

Photo 5: Turkish School-2

Photo 6: Turkish School-1